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AUTHOR Millonzi, Carol: And Others
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ABSTRACT

A middle school program in Phoenix, New York, was planned to provide for trainable and low functioning educable mentally retarded students in an integrated setting. Cooperation between the planning team and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation resulted in a program for 13 students aged 11 to 14 with four major areas of concentration: social skills, survival academics, work skills and habits (including independent classwork, a job program with actual work experience, and career exploration), and independent living skills (kitchen management and home maintenance). (CL)

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A Total Curricular Approach to Pre-Vocational Training of Retarded Adolescents in an Integrated Setting

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Presented by: Phoenix Central School District, Phoenix, N.Y.
and
The New York State Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Syracuse, N. Y.

Date: April 17, 1981

Participants:

Carol Millonzi, Special Education Teacher
Jennifer DeVivo, Special Education Teacher
Norma Widmann, Director of Special Education
Vincent DeVivo, Rehabilitation Counselor

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Program Need

Since 1971 trainable mentally retarded (TMR) and low functioning educable mentally retarded (EMR) students have been partially mainstreamed into elementary classes in the Phoenix School District.* No continuation of this program existed beyond grade three. As these children became too old to continue in the elementary school program, two options were available to them: 1) higher functioning students could continue at the middle school in a primarily self-contained EMR classroom with an academic emphasis. 2) lower functioning students could attend a segregated BOCES TMR program, eighteen miles away, where they would receive some pre-vocational training, plus basic academic skills.

Special education staff, and parents of the retarded students liked the academic and social progress made by the children in the integrated elementary setting and resented having to send them to a segregated setting when they reached age 11. A strong need was felt to develop a middle school extension of the elementary program which would meet the needs of both the TMR and low functioning EMR students.

Program Planning

A program planning team consisting of three special education teachers and the director of special education met informally to brainstorm ideas. Consenus was reached on the following basic program needs: survival academic skills, pre-

* Phoenix Central Schools, Phoenix, N.Y. 13135. A rural school district of 2900 students located 18 miles north of Syracuse, N.Y. Special Education department consists of 8 special education teachers, 1 1/2 speech therapists and 3 teacher aides.

vocational training, social development, and independent living skills. A need was also felt to create positive attitudes towards the handicapped students in a school where no previous TMR students had been enrolled.

The planning team's pre-conceived belief was that pre-vocational training for adolescents included a great deal of "hands on" activities requiring an extensive array of shop and other types of equipment. Such equipment and the specialized instruction required would not be available at the Phoenix Middle School.* While the team knew three of the four basic program needs could be met in the home district, it was thought that the fourth major component, pre-vocational training, could not be made available within the school district.

Before abandoning the idea of developing an integrated program, the team visited BOCES to observe their pre-vocational program and to determine if there were any way an equally appropriate program could be offered in Phoenix. The team was pleasantly surprised to find its preconceived ideas were false. The adolescent component of the pre-vocational program did not include use of the shops and occupational training equipment, but focused on the development of those social and communication skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment. Skills found to be prerequisites to specific task or job training included: adhering to a schedule, caring for personal hygiene, accepting responsibility, cooperating with co-workers, following directions, etc. The team felt that all the skills pre-requisite to specific job training could be better developed in an in-

* E. J. Dillon Middle School, Phoenix, N. Y.

tegrated setting, with appropriate role models, than in a segregated setting.

With administrative support, an enthusiastic team, and the promise of zero dollars for additional staff, supplies, and equipment, plans continued towards the development of a middle school program to begin September 1981.

Relationship with Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)

The State of New York encourages cooperation between special education, occupational education, and vocational rehabilitation in providing services for the handicapped. Having discovered its misconceptions of pre-vocational training, the team contacted the Syracuse branch of the New York State Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to request a consultant to assist them with program planning. OVR, whose role is to help handicapped individuals prepare for suitable employment and become self-supporting, expressed interest in the Phoenix project. While direct OVR evaluation and counseling services are not offered prior to age sixteen, this office felt that many job adjustment problems could be avoided through early intervention and preparation. Such intervention and preparation would include developing good work habits in school, and beginning realistic vocational exploration at an early age. The local director of OVR assigned a rehabilitation counselor, Mr. Vincent DeVivo, to work with the program planning team. Mr. DeVivo's background included experience in task analysis and pre-training evaluation of handicapped workers. The final planning team consisted of:

Jennifer DeVivo, special education teacher, Phoenix CS
Sheila Hathaway, special education teacher, Phoenix CS
Carol Millonzi, special education teacher, Phoenix CS
Margaret Whitaker, home economics teacher, Phoenix CS
Norma Widmann, Director of Special Ed and PPS, Phoenix CS
Vincent DeVivo, Rehabilitation Counselor, OVR

Five hundred dollars of EHA Title VI-B flow-through funds was available to reimburse the teachers on the team for time spent in program development. This was the entire additional funding for program development and implementation.

The Program

The program was developed prior to July 1, the deadline for utilizing the EHA funds, and began September 1981. Ten retarded children, ages 11 to 14, were originally assigned to the program. Three others have since joined the class. No additional staff were employed, as the program replaced the former self-contained EMR class which had had a primarily academic emphasis.

The program adopted has four inter-related major components, each based on what students will need to survive as adults at varying degrees of independence and productivity: social skills, survival academics, work skills and habits, and independent living skills.

Emphasis throughout the program is on high expectations for appropriate behavior and independent functioning, and on changing attitudes in the school and community by showing students abilities rather than their disabilities. Opportunities are sought for involving other students, teachers, and community members in the program, and for exposing the students, in a positive way, to a variety of school and community activities.

Social Skills Interwoven throughout the entire program are behavior and communication skills related to enhancing each students image as a competent person. High expectations are held for proper behavior at all times. Students have many opportunities to be with their non-handicapped peers, as they are mainstreamed for music, art, industrial arts, practical arts, physical education, lunch, homeroom, transportation, and school social activities. When necessary, adaptations in regular class requirements are jointly planned between the regular and special education teacher. Students who need additional assistance in order to be mainstreamed, are paired with a non-handicapped buddy. Those students with the greatest need to develop social skills and positive peer relationships are assigned a companion through the "Friends" program, a program in which high school students in the National Honor Society establish a relationship with a middle school student.

Students have additional opportunities to develop and demonstrate their social skills through class project demonstrations and through special social events which they plan. This year the class prepared and served a luncheon for the local senior citizens group. They also held a "Thank-You" party for all school staff who had "hired" class members for particular jobs or projects. A weekly salad bar, which the class prepares for the teachers, brings students into direct contact with regular education staff, enhances their image, and gives them further opportunity to develop their social skills and self-confidence.

Survival Academics In planning what academics to teach, consideration is given to where each child is at this midpoint in his school career, and what skills will be useful and necessary for survival as an independent and productive adult. Phonics, sight vocabulary, and computations are maintained and further developed through practical applications in contexts which are encountered in daily living. Reading includes signs, labels, forms, directions, and advertising. Math includes money, time and measurement. Writing includes invitations, announcements, and thank-you-notes. Basic survival skills become further developed through practical application in the work skills and independent living aspects of the total program.

Workskills and Habits Workskills and habits are sub-divided into three areas: independent classwork; job program; and career exploration.

Independent Classwork A procedure has been established within the classroom involving a sequence of activities leading to independent completion of a task. Through daily repetition, students learn to select a task card at their level (based on IEP's), match it to an activity card, complete the activity, chart their progress, and move on to the next task until the activity sequence is completed. This procedure encourages independence, is related to sequential activities required in unskilled or semi-skilled labor, permits students to work on individualized materials, and frees the teacher to assist individual students.

Job Program The primary purpose of the job program is the provision of actual work experiences which require use of the skills and behaviors being developed through all phases of the program. A secondary purpose is changing school attitudes and perceptions of the special education students.

A survey was conducted to determine staff needs which might be met through "employing" special education students. Jobs were divided into those to be done in the special education classroom, under the direction of the special education teacher, and those that could be done in other parts of the building.

Jobs done in the special education class include cutting, sorting, and filing "cents-off" coupons, which are then placed in the faculty room; collating papers, which involves counting, sorting, packaging, labeling, and delivering materials; separating and sorting computer fan-fold print-outs; alphabetizing materials; and folding, stapling, and sorting mailings. The special education teacher has established a quality control check of all materials handled by her students. This is part of her continuous effort to enhance the image of her students.

Jobs done throughout the building that simulate real jobs include: re-arranging desks, cleaning cafeteria tables, dusting (custodial); caring for plants (greenhouse, nursery); assisting in the cafeteria (food service). Jobs which the special education students handle outside of the classroom vary in the amount of staff supervision required. A student working in the health office replenishing supplies and making beds is closely supervised as is a student working in the library labeling and shelving books.

Minimal supervision is required for students working in the main office sorting mail or for those cleaning in the cafeteria. Students setting up and delivering the salad bar are able, at this time, to complete this task with total independence. This is the goal of all work experiences.

Career Exploration The purposes of career exploration are to discover realistic job interests, and to provide an awareness of the world of work. This is best done by visits to business establishments and industries where students have first hand experiences in observing workers. This year the class visited a local restaurant and a large sheltered workshop. The school austerity budget could not permit additional trips, but did allow for speakers in various career fields to come to the school for an Annual Career Day. The special education students attended this career day along with the rest of the school population, but were encouraged to attend those sessions dealing with careers in which they might realistically find future employment. The number of appropriate careers being represented was limited, and it is planned for future Career Days to include greater participation of un-skilled and semi-skilled laborers.

Independent Living Skills For the first year of the program independent living skills includes kitchen management and home maintenance. Future plans call for expansion to include health, hygiene, clothing care, transportation, child care, and home repairs.

Kitchen Management One of the home economics kitchens is available to the special education students for fifty minutes each day. Skills have been arranged sequentially, with each kitchen unit concentrating on a specific cooking process. Developmental progress is from non-cooking procedures (raw vegetables, salads, sandwiches), to stove cooking (boiling, frying), to oven cooking (baking, roasting). Each unit uses and builds upon skills learned in the previous unit. Eventually all skills are combined to produce a complete meal. Each unit incorporates nutrition, use of proper tools and utensils, safety rules, the care and storage of foods and equipment, following directions, and measurement. Those students unable to understand the concepts of fractions are taught to match the numerals in a recipe with the same fraction on the measuring cup.

Parents are informed of all kitchen projects and are encouraged to assist their children in practicing the skills at home. At the completion of each unit the students demonstrate what they have learned. Parents and school staff are invited to attend these demonstrations. Progress evaluations are completed by parents, teacher, and student.

Home Maintenance The second area of independent living skills involves care of foods and the kitchen. Students participate in grocery shopping, where they utilize their math skills and practice comparison shopping. Proper food storage including wrapping, refrigerating, and freezing are practiced. Students are expected to clean their work areas, and wash all

dishes and utensils which they use. On a weekly basis students clean the stove, refrigerator, counters, and floor.

Future of the Program

Although only in its first year of operation, this program has been an outstanding success, well received by administration, community members, the entire school staff, parents and students. The major reason for this success can be directly attributed to the enthusiasm and dedication of Carol Millonzi, the special education teacher involved in the day-to-day planning and implementation of the program.

Future plans for the program include expanding the independent living skills to include health, hygiene, clothing care, transportation, child care, and more home maintenance skills including minor repairs. There are plans to develop more in-school jobs with students working alongside school employees such as cafeteria workers, custodians, buildings and grounds maintenance workers, and clerical aides. Community service organizations will be surveyed to determine if they have jobs which could be done by the special education students, such as preparing and serving at community functions, handling community mailings, collating and other routine matters. Teachers have requested that the salad bar be expanded to include soups, desserts, or casseroles. As additional jobs become available within the school and community, plans include having the students apply for the job and go through an interviewing procedure. Future plans also include expansion of the school Career Day to encompass unskilled and semi-skilled laborers.

In order for this program to continue to be successful it is necessary to develop an upward extension for the high school level. This would eliminate the present practice of sending all TMR and low functioning EMR students to BOCES either on a full or part-time basis. Initial contacts have been made with OVR to jointly develop a community work-study program for on-the-job experience for high school students. Students in ninth and tenth grade will either attend BOCES pre-vocational training programs three half days a week, or will be provided in-school work experiences similar to those at the middle school level. Juniors and seniors will attend school half days and be assigned to a community work site, where they will be paid minimum wage (partially paid by OVR), while they gain on the job experience. Supervision will be jointly provided by school personnel and an OVR counselor.

Thought has also been given to a downward extension of the middle school program. At the elementary level a need is felt to expose students to jobs which they might do in the future. This would be done through pictures, film strips and community speakers. By fourth grade students might profit from visits to a fast food restaurant, a hospital or a factory where they could observe assembly line workers. The object would be to make students aware, at an early age, that going to work means more than leaving home and returning eight hours later.

Conclusion

In its first year of operation the total curricular approach to pre-vocational training of retarded adolescents in an integrated setting has accomplished many of its goals. Stu-

dents learn useful skills that will equip them for more independent adult lives. Skills and concepts are learned through practical application within a meaningful context, and students are exposed to a variety of school and community situations increasing their interactions with non-handicapped peers and adults. The school and community have benefitted through the work done by the students, and through being exposed to people with special needs in a positive way. The students contributions to the school and community increase their chances for future acceptance and pave the way for the community businesses to consider hiring these students for work-study positions, when they reach high school age.

The program was accomplished at no additional expense through cooperation between the school district and OVR. It very effectively meets the educational needs of retarded adolescents without removing them from their home school.

Appendix

1. Letter to parents concerning home practice of kitchen management skills
2. Parent evaluation of student kitchen skills
3. Student self-evaluation
4. Evaluation form used by regular and special area teachers
5. Building-wide survey of job needs
6. Comments from nurse who "employed" one special education student

Dear Parents,

A pre-vocational program is being developed for some of our special education students here at E. J. Dillon. The program will emphasize the skills, habits, and attitudes needed for daily living and for holding jobs, either in a sheltered workshop setting or within the community.

This year, we are very fortunate to have the Practical Arts room available to us for one period a day. During that time we will be involved in a series of Kitchen Workshops, where cooking skills and general work habits will be learned and practiced.

As each step of a particular cooking task has been mastered in school, you will be asked to give your child an opportunity to use these skills at home and to fill out an evaluation sheet concerning his work. Using a practical skill in a real-life situation is probably the best way to maintain what has been learned.

I hope to have a chance to tell you more about the program at conference time and to give you more opportunities throughout the year to become involved in your child s education.

Thanks for your help and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Carol Millonzi

HOME PRACTICE EVALUATION

_____ is practicing the following skills
(name)
in Kitchen Workshop _____

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

The best success for learning these skills requires practice in other daily living situations.

When your child has had one week of daily home practice sessions, please sign and return this form with your comments.

An individual student demonstration will follow on _____ to serve as an evaluation of the skill performance. (date) Thereafter, any opportunities to use this skill at home should be encouraged.

Sincerely,

- -

COMMENTS:

Student Self Evaluation

Name _____ Date _____

I follow directions

- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

I finish my work on time

- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

My work is

- ☐ Neat
- ☐ O.K.
- ☐ Sloppy

I take care of my materials

- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

I work safely

- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

I get along with other students

- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

I participate in group projects

- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

My favorite job is _____
_____.

I do not like doing _____
_____.

I would like to do _____
_____.

NAME _____ DATE _____

SUBJECT/TEACHER _____

VERY GOOD

FAIR/AVERAGE

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

WORK HABITS

_____ 1. Follows teacher's instructions.

_____ 2. Asks for help in an effective manner.

_____ 3. Goes from one step to another in proper sequence.

_____ 4. Stays with a job until completed.

_____ 5. Concentrates on task: is attentive and alert.

_____ 6. Does own work and doesn't interfere with others.

_____ 7. Accepts responsibility for work.

_____ 8. Respects school materials and equipment [doesn't waste, damage, or lose.]

_____ 9. Cleans up.

_____ 10. Observes appropriate safety and/or hygiene practices.

_____ 11. Works well independently.

SOCIAL SKILLS

_____ 1. Participates in projects, activities and discussions.

_____ 2. Courteous and cooperative to others.

_____ 3. Shares materials and teacher's attention.

_____ 4. Respects rights and property of others.

_____ 5. Interacts with others in appropriate manner.

_____ 6. Works without grumbling or losing temper.

COMMENTS:

A pre-vocational program is being developed for some of our self-contained E.M.R. students here at E. J. Dillon. The program will emphasize the skills, habits, and attitudes needed for daily living and for holding jobs, either in a sheltered workshop setting or within the community.

Many simple tasks required daily within the school could provide an opportunity for skill training within a meaningful context, while enabling students to perform a valuable service to the faculty and staff.

At this time I would like to take a survey of the demand for workers in the areas listed below. Feel free to add any other tasks that might be suitable. All work will be fully supervised and inspected for quality.

Please fill out and return at your earliest convenience. Thanks for your help and cooperation.

Carol Millonzi

Teacher _____

Indicate how often and how much for each item checked off:

_____ Collate

_____ Staple

_____ Package

_____ Label/Number

_____ Assemble

_____ Sort

_____ Categorize

_____ Alphabetize

_____ Numerical Order

_____ Match

_____ Delivery

_____ Light Cleaning

_____ Other

Comments/Suggestions..

Reflections on the Work Program: Mary Carter, Nurse

"I think it's a wonderful idea...I had one boy assigned to my office. There was a tremendous change in his self-concept and in his confidence in himself.

"I had made out a list of his duties and he came in everyday to check them off and within a week he knew just what he had to do and did the assigned tasks. He really seemed to have a feeling of self-importance from being able to do them. He never had to ask me more than once or twice where anything was, but would say "Does anything need filling today?" He took pride in what he was doing. He loved to take my [supply] keys and open the door and refill supplies. He enjoyed it... he liked having that kind of responsibility and we had a nice relationship. He felt this was a special place to come to even though there might be other students in the room for treatment. He seemed to feel he had some command over what was happening - he sort of felt he was my assistant - and it showed assertiveness on his part.

"It made me feel he might be able to hold a job with simple tasks to work with. He'd make a good stockroom boy."